

Packing it in can be a pain in the boot

The Associated Press

Seems like a simple enough project for the road trip: Get the stuff the family needs, put it in suitcases and drop them into the trunk. Right?

Maybe. Auto makers have been paying more attention in recent years to trunk size, trying to create the most amount of room for the things that Americans just can't do without.

But trunk space does have its limits as families trying to save gas money by using a small car for a vacation find out all too often.

Yet with a little planning and some careful placement, a lot of gear can be packed into a trunk without having to use a shoehorn. Ford Motor Co.'s North American Design staff has some suggestions for efficient packing:

■ Pack the large pieces first, preferably luggage lying flat on the trunk floor between wheel wells.

■ Reserve a little bit of time and try out different configurations. The idea is to eliminate as much area between pieces of baggage as possible.

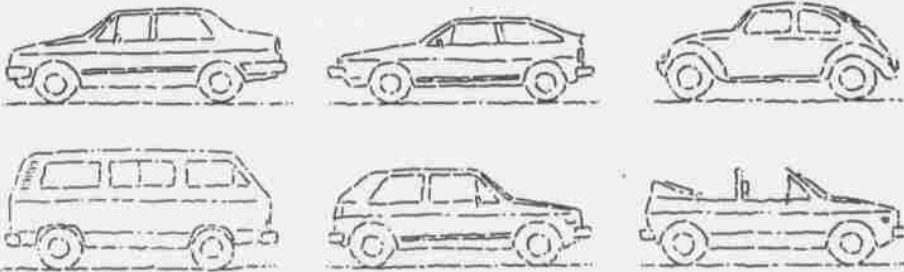


Getting it all to fit can take some maneuvering

DTH file photo

- Small, hard-sided baggage goes in next, closest to the rear seat, atop the three-suiters.
- Use the smallest pieces and soft-sided luggage to fill in the spaces.
- Golf bags go on top or beside the big pieces, along the rear edge of the trunk.

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Weathering the roads when skies aren't sunny

The Associated Press

"Gee, isn't that an unusual cloud, Henry?" says Gert as the two drive across Iowa.

"Sure is, Gert. In fact, it seems to be growing a tail."

Encountering severe weather, be it a tornado, heavy wind, earthquake or a blizzard can be a frightening thing. Especially when people are in a ton and a half of metal, rolling at 50 mph down a lonely stretch of road.

The Weather Channel, a cable television station devoted to meteorological coverage, has prepared a booklet in conjunction with the American Red Cross and Michelin Tire Corp. on how motorists can handle weather emergencies.

Some severe weather, such as blizzards or hurricanes, can be predicted hours or even days in advance. Others, such as tornadoes and earthquakes, occur without warning.

Generally, it pays to pay attention. Tuning in news-oriented radio stations when skies appear threatening should be routine for any good motorist.

Here are some tips on how to deal with some events of nature:

■ **Hurricane.** The best use of a car is to get out of the way of the storm when official evacuation orders are given. Failing that, don't use a car as shelter in these enormous storms. And even after a hurricane has passed and it looks clear, flash floods often occur, so don't count on driving coastal roads or near swollen streams.

■ **Earthquake.** The booklet advises motorists to stay in their cars but away from bridges, power lines or trees during earthquakes. There is little chance of fissures swallowing cars in the man-

ner which Hollywood has portrayed in the past. When the shaking stops, proceed carefully and remember that bridges and overpasses might have been weakened by the temblor.

■ **Tornado.** A tornado can toss a car around like a golf ball. If a tornado is spotted, get out of the car and look for shelter. If no apparent shelter is available, head for a ditch and lie flat, protecting your head and face. Remember, tornadoes can move fast and they don't have to yield to oncoming traffic.

■ **Flood.** Flood waters can rise quickly and carry a lot of force. Never try to drive through water on a roadway. Avoid dips in roads under bridges where flood waters can form quickly. If you are caught in a flood, get out of the car and try to get to higher ground.

■ **Thunderstorm.** Heavy, dark clouds can carry rain, hail and sleet, all of which can cause havoc for motorists. If you're caught in a heavy thunderstorm with a hard-topped car, park it away from trees, which can act like lightning rods, and stay in the vehicle. If you are in a soft-topped car, evacuate it if you can.

■ **Blizzard.** Some of the best protection is winterizing the car before starting on a trip. Check to be sure the car is equipped with proper tires for snow and ice travel, keep the gas tank as close to full as possible, and carry emergency gear. If you get stuck in a winter storm, stay in the car and tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna. Run the heater as needed, but only if a downwind window is open a bit to allow poisonous carbon monoxide gas to escape. Be sure the exhaust pipe isn't blocked by snow or ice.

Drivers should be prepared for anything when night falls

The Associated Press

Driving at night, even in familiar parts of town, can be a troubling thing if something goes wrong.

One of the most helpful tools in a car for anyone driving through rough or unfamiliar neighborhoods or parking in an unsecured lot or deck can be a car phone. But not everyone needs one.

With a little forethought, a nighttime drive can be made as safe as possible.

In addition to normal maintenance precautions, here are some safety-related ideas from the Chicago Automobile Trade Association:

■ Always keep at least a half-tank of gasoline in your car, lessening the chance of having to pump gas after nightfall.

■ Know the route to your destination. If you need to consult a map, study it before you set out so you won't have to juggle a map, steering wheel and a gear shifter while in strange territory.

■ If you have the opportunity, drive the route in the daytime, remembering landmarks along the way. Keep in mind that things can look a lot different at night than in the daytime.

■ Lock your doors at all times.

■ Drive more slowly than you would during the day. Your range of vision at night is shorter, meaning you have less time to react to sudden changes in the traffic pattern.

■ Drive in the center lane. Outside lanes are more likely to have standing water or other debris in them.

■ If another driver flashes lights at you, check to be sure your lights are on and all your doors are closed and keep driving. If the flashing continues, stop only when you are absolutely sure that the other car is a police car.

■ If you have mechanical problems, turn on your four-way flashers and pull safely out of the traffic stream. Stay in your car with your windows rolled up and your doors locked. Wait for a police or roadside assistance vehicle to arrive.

■ Park under a light and look around for anything suspicious.

■ When approaching your parked vehicle, have your keys ready.

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